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ABSTRACT

This literature review surveys the varieties and purposes of connections between schools and communities, from home-school relationships to schools as social service centers and communities as school curricula. It explores the benefits of school-community connections to students, communities, and schools. It describes the processes by which productive relationships form and identifies obstacles to their formation. It outlines the features common to successful collaborations between schools and communities and examines evidence of their success. The review compares and contrasts the ways rural and urban contexts influence the nature of relationships between schools and communities, considers the role faith-based organizations may play in building connections, and explores the value of technology in creating and strengthening relationships. Finally, this paper points to areas for further exploration, such as developing indicators of readiness for school-community collaborations, documenting the ways technology is and can build and reinforce relationships, broadening the definition of community to include communities of interest and influence that extend beyond physical boundaries, and designing evaluation methods that include the concerns of collaborators and may be implemented by them. (Contains 126 references.) (Author)

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School-Community Connections: A Literature Review

Marian C. Keyes
Soleil Gregg

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Marian C. Keyes
Soleil Gregg

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AEL, Inc.
P. O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325
800-624-9120

AEL is a catalyst for schools and communities to build lifelong learning systems that harness resources, research, and practical wisdom. AEL serves as the Regional Educational Laboratory for Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. For these same four states, it operates the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education. The Region IV Comprehensive Center at AEL serves North and South Carolina in addition to these states. AEL also operates the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Information about AEL projects, programs, and services is available by writing or calling AEL.

Post Office Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325-1348
304-347-0400
800-624-9120
304-347-0487 (fax)
aelinfo@ael.org
http://www.ael.org

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Abstract

This literature review surveys the varieties and purposes of connections between schools and communities, from home-school relationships to schools as social service centers and communities as school curricula. It explores the benefits of school-community connections to students, communities, and schools. It describes the processes by which productive relationships form and identifies obstacles to their formation. It outlines the features common to successful collaborations between schools and communities and examines evidence of their success.

The review compares and contrasts the ways rural and urban contexts influence the nature of relationships between schools and communities, considers the role faith-based organizations may play in building connections, and explores the value of technology in creating and strengthening relationships.

Finally, this paper points to areas for further exploration, such as developing indicators of readiness for school-community collaborations, documenting the ways technology is and can build and reinforce relationships, broadening the definition of community to include communities of interest and influence that extend beyond physical boundaries, and designing evaluation methods that include the concerns of collaborators and may be implemented by them.

School-Community Connections: A Literature Review

Part of the work to which AEL, Inc. has committed in the 2001-2005 regional educational laboratory contract is connecting "schools [in its region] to communities and communities to schools to promote long-term development and sustainability of both school and community" (AEL, 2000 p. 4.0-10). AEL intends to work with selected low-performing schools, using strategies identified through experience and research, to help them become high-performing learning communities. The impact of changes in policy and/or practice will be measured by student performance and other indicators. AEL's understanding of "school" goes beyond the physical plant in which formal K-12 instruction occurs to include the places and contexts in which lifelong learning occurs.

The purpose of this literature review is to determine what others have learned about how a community can participate in and support learning, for the benefit both of individuals and of the community itself. The research literatures that address school-community connections are diverse, encompassing those concerned with community development, school improvement, at-risk students and resiliency, issues arising from urban and rural contexts, educational policy and politics, family involvement in education, and the community school movement. This review samples all, but examines most deeply those that address the interactions between school and community that shape student learning.

Meaning of the Term "Community"

To consider school-community connections first requires an understanding of the term "community." It is used to refer to both a place and—from its Latin origin—to a state of fellowship or relationship. One may live in a location that has a name and recognized features distinguishing it from other communities. At the same time one may belong to many social and professional communities within that location. People also belong to communities that extend beyond physical boundaries, connecting them through commonalities of interests, concerns, and beliefs. R. L. Warren (cited in Heimstra, 1997) provides a framework for analyzing these two dimensions of

community, with the horizontal axis describing aspects of locality and the vertical axis representing relationships based on common interests and beliefs.

While the implicit understanding of community in the literature that focuses on school-community connections is one of place—that is, the location or neighborhood in which a school is situated—in fact, school employees and community residents are connected to people beyond their immediate environs, affecting and affected by outside relationships, circumstances, and decisions.

Those researchers who define a community as a place examine physical and statistical features to determine its capacity to sustain itself. For example, the University of Wisconsin's Cooperative Extension Service identifies the features of community capacity as the condition and extent of

- economy and individuals (energy, health, housing, wealth, population, transportation)
- business (diversity, growth, stability, tourism)
- agriculture and natural resources (farming, forests, pest management)
- education (adult, cultural, primary and secondary, post secondary)
- environment (air quality, land use, biodiversity, water resources, management of societal waste, citizen involvement)
- government (citizen involvement, effectiveness of public services) (Liebl, et al., 1998)

Thomas McKnight captures the spirit of community as state of being when he says, "You can tell that you are in community if you hear laughter and singing" (Moore, 1993). Those who define community in this way assess human attitudes and behavior to determine a community's well-being. The Saguaro Seminar (2001), an association of scholars and thinkers based at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, used this approach in its national survey of social capital community benchmarks. This survey of 30,000 respondents in 40 communities across 29 states was designed "to measure the *amount* of social capital in various communities" as well as the distribution

of social capital within a community (p. 6). It mapped the relative strengths and areas for improvement in a community's civic behavior. The survey assessed people's responses to questions concerning 11 facets of social capital:

1. social trust
2. interracial trust
3. diversity of friendships
4. conventional politics participation
5. protest politics participation
6. civic leadership
7. associational involvement
8. informal socializing
9. giving and volunteering
10. faith-based engagement
11. equality of civic engagement across the community

The survey found social connectedness to be a much stronger predictor of personal happiness and the perceived quality of life in a community than income or educational level (p. 7).

The two foci of community as place and as state of being are not mutually exclusive. Although communities can certainly benefit from felicitous locations that may be rich in natural resources or have fortunate placements at transportation hubs, most physical features of community capacity are achieved (or not) through human agency, so attitudes and behaviors shape them, even as such features influence people's attitudes and behaviors.

Community Development

According to the Harwood Group (1999), a public issues research and innovations forum, communities, like people, have stages of development. Their readiness for change depends on their developmental stage. The least ready for change is the stage called "the waiting place." In the waiting place people know that things are not working right, but feel disconnected from decision makers. They feel stuck and wait for someone else to fix things. The second stage is that of "impasse," at which point circumstances have reached a crisis, so people fear for their economic livelihood. At this point they feel helpless and hopeless. If their discomfort propels people to break with the status quo, then the building of what the Group calls public capital can truly begin. The third stage is called "catalytic," during which "a small group of people and organizations emerge to take risks and experiment in ways that challenge existing norms of how the community works." The fourth stage, that of "growth," is one in which networks expand and feelings of common purpose and direction take deep root. In the final stage, "sustain and renew," the community has created a new, positive, story about itself, but must find ways to renew leadership, lest it stagnate and begin to decline (pp.7-9). The Harwood Group's system of analysis addresses community development in a way that may or may not include schools as development partners.

Nature of School-Community Connections

> Rural education scholars like [Alan] DeYoung and Paul Theobald believe that schools' consideration of 'the community' is too often *instrumental*, focusing on what the district needs to get from voters. Too seldom is it *substantive*, focusing on how the school can help sustain the locality of which it is, or should be, an important part (Howley, Hadden, & Harmon, 2000, p.150).

A recent national poll conducted by the Publishers Educational Network (Deily, 2001) indicated that public views reflect this consideration. People see their role as being informed about school board candidates and voting, not as volunteering or being

otherwise involved in schools. Deily comments that, based on the poll, "Americans seem content to sit back and let the advocates, experts and educators take over." Lane and Dorfman call this stance vis-a-vis schools the "therapeutic state: loss of responsibility, power and ownership . . . a nation of clients seeking benefits" (1997, p. 4). "Public Schools, Are They Making the Grade?," a series of forums held across the country by National Issues Forums (Harris Interactive Inc., 2000), revealed that while people were overwhelmingly committed to the idea of a quality public education, they didn't want more control over school administration or operations. However, the report stated, people wished that schools were more central to community life. Forum participants felt that the attitudes of educators, particularly administrators, blocked a closer relationship with schools. Interestingly, the term "closer relationship" is substantive rather than instrumental in tenor. Research conducted by Rachel Becker-Klein (1999) among parents of former Head Start children reflects this poll result. She found that the amount of contact with school was less related to parents' income level than to the quality and amount of school communication and parents' previous experience with school.

DeYoung and Theobald were addressing schools' relationships to rural communities, but these scholars captured essential differences in relationships in general—between and among individuals, groups, or institutions.

Those who operate from instrumental motives plan actions in order to persuade, manipulate, or coerce others to behave in particular ways. Those who operate from substantive motives shape their actions to support the common good, which is jointly determined through dialogue and experience over time. Actions that are instrumental in nature are not likely to create closer relationships.

Purpose of School-Community Connections

Brett Lane and Diane Dorfman (1997) define collaboration between schools and communities as having two main goals:

1. to strengthen and increase social capital by forming strong social networks;

developing active, democratic participation; and fostering a sense of trust and community

2. to increase the ability and capacity of the community to utilize stocks of social capital to produce meaningful and sustainable community renewal (p.10)

Thus the goal of collaboration is both process oriented (building social capital) and task oriented (using social capital to achieve outcomes that benefit people). Task orientation concerns outcomes that produce improvements in a community understood as "place."

Typical discussions of social capital appear to be grounded in the assumption that schools will help people in the community develop social capital and form connections to the school. It would appear that an equal task in collaboration is to develop social capital within the school, by increasing its connections with and trust in the community.

Role of Faith-Based Organizations in School-Community Connections

Churches build social capital by strengthening the ethical and spiritual dimensions of human experience. Historians have documented the particular role of African American churches as catalysts for social reform (Kusimo & Trulear, 2000). In poor communities, churches may be the only local institutions that hold the trust and respect of their members. In recognition of the unique credibility churches have in their communities and their history of social service, President Bush has established an Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, charged with establishing policies, priorities, and objectives to enable the work of faith-based and other community service groups (The White House, 2001). This new federal stance toward religious organizations creates opportunities for schools to partner with groups that have strong commitments to supporting the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of young

people. At the same time, in the context of a national history based on the separation of church and state and protection of freedom of religious expression, it raises questions about how best to work together without violating the rights of students and of churches. The Department of Education, and the Department of Health and Human Services have developed guidelines for such partnerships (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The guidelines attempt to ensure that programs developed by school-faith community partnerships do not subject students to religious persuasion or exclude them because of religious belief.

In addition to partnerships to support youth programs—after-school care, tutoring, leadership development, pregnancy prevention, and the like—churches can open doors to new groups. A recent study funded by the American Association of Retired Persons found that each American belongs, on average, to four community groups. The most commonly cited is a religious organization (Kreinin, Kuhn, Rodgers, & Hutchins,1999, p. 33). The study identified original material that could help in a campaign to prevent teen pregnancy. The authors found churches to be vehicles for networking with parents and community leaders who might otherwise be beyond the reach of schools. The authors recommend ongoing dialogue among partners to find common ground, *as well as to discover what ground cannot be shared* (p. 43). They offer tips for school staff persons who work with faith communities. They include

1. Become familiar with the people, beliefs, and practices of a variety of local faith communities. Ask members to explain their traditions and beliefs. Acknowledge and respect beliefs, even when they conflict with your own.
2. Acknowledge biases or stereotypes. Staff should ask trusted members of a faith community to speak up when they see staff operating from these biases.
3. Accept a faith community as a full partner, allowing it to inform staff just as staff would like to inform it.
4. Focus on the points of agreement. Don't allow points of disagreement to prevent collaborating on specific activities.

5. Publicly and privately recognize and appreciate work a faith community has already been doing with its own youth (p. 35).

Possibly the most critical caution in working with faith communities is to maintain neutrality and inclusiveness.

Students as Community Members

Schools may regard their proper role to be that of responsibility for students, not that of community member. However, the literature on school reform recommends that learning be connected to students' lives in the "real world," i.e., in their communities (Decker & Decker, 2000; Lane & Dorfman,1997; Stone & Wehlage, 1992). Certainly, schools recognize that students' academic success may be compromised by social conditions beyond school walls. In fact, Steven Durlauf (2000), in "The Memberships Theory of Poverty: The Role of Group Affiliations in Determining Socioeconomic Outcomes," points out that youths' attitudes toward academic success are shaped by group affiliations, not just physical, social, and psychological circumstances. Research conducted by Barbara Lawrence (1998) in a poor, isolated Maine community found that students performed well in local schools whose quality of instruction and community connections were highly regarded both locally and in the state. Yet few went to college because the community valued self-reliance and practical pursuits over intellectual ones. Community influences conveyed the message that it was important to do well in school, but was not important to leave the community for college (p. 293). Lawrence identifies eight school conditions that influence student aspirations no matter their boundaries of gender, geography, culture, age, or economic status. These are: achievement, belonging, curiosity, empowerment, excitement, mentoring, risk-taking, and self-confidence (Lawrence, App. 2, pp. 11-13). Four of the eight have to do directly with relationships.

Scholars of rural education have observed that asking students to aspire to achievements that are alien to "the knowledge structures of their parents (and

community) drives a wedge between family and school" (Spears, Combs, & Bailey, 1990, p. 6). And asking students to attend to learning that is unconnected to their family and community experience leaches motivation. As one student claimed in an interview with Karen Anijar (2001), "I think that the schools try to make us into zombies. I don't want to be a zombie, do you?" (p. 253). Anijar asserts that "what remains central to [students'] educational aspirations are the ethical, political, and economic dimensions of curriculum" that have to do with life in community, for better or worse (p. 248). Mavis Sanders (1996) echoes Anijar in reporting the results of a national survey of 317 African American youths, conducted by Bowman and Howard. Grades were lowest among the one-third of the youths who reported that their parents had told them nothing about race relations in the United States, the ethical, political, and economic influences of which infused their lives (p. 42).

Benefit to Students of School-Community Collaborations

Calvin Stone and Gary Wehlage (1992), in *Community Collaboration and Restructuring*, warn against regarding student problems as solely individual rather than social in nature, and framing solutions only in terms of what the school intends to provide. They point out that students whose school and community experiences leave them without hope of a productive future are unlikely to be motivated by academic pursuits. Milbrey McLaughlin (2001) followed for 10 years youth who, before her study, had been involved in a community program that provided sanctuary and support in an urban neighborhood besieged by the stressors that accompany extreme poverty. She found most of them—far more of them than their peers—were employed and active members of their communities. Like Stone and Wehlage, she points out that the desire to attain academic success "is not enough to motivate young people to tackle challenges, succeed on the job, or . . . navigate the institutions of mainstream society" (p. 17).

There is an extensive body of theory and research about the factors necessary to develop resilience in children and youth. Beginning with Werner and Smith's seminal

research on resiliency (1982) and James Coleman's development of the construct of social capital (1988), scholars have described and documented the conditions in family, school, and community necessary for children to thrive (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Bernard, 1991; Katz, 1995; Milstein & Henry, 2000; Zimmerman & Arunkumar,1994). These include bonding to family, other adults, and peers; clear, consistent boundaries; life skills; high expectations; meaningful participation in family, school, and community; supportive social networks; and access to basic community resources, such as adequate housing, food, and health care (Kneidek, 1992).

Such conditions are promoted by environments in which people know and are connected to one another over time in positive ways, and in which people are willing to give their attention, time, and skills for the benefit of the community (Milstein & Henry, 2000, p. 101).

Family, as well as community, is critical to the academic success of children. Joyce Epstein and many others have confirmed through research both the importance and nature of family influence on students' academic success (Epstein, 1992; Henderson & Berla, 1994b). It has long been conventional wisdom that parents from middle- and upper-class communities have the personal and social resources to support children's school success, and are likely to be involved with school affairs. The implicit converse is that families from stressed low-income communities lack the personal and social resources to have a positive effect on their children's learning (Bempechat,1990).

However, in *Family Life and School Achievement: Why Poor Black Children Succeed or Fail,* Reginald Clark (1983) examined the conditions that, among families under similar social and economic stress, contributed to the academic success or failure of their children. He identified 17 factors that distinguished households of high achievers from those of low achievers. Some of the factors were consistent with resilience research, such as clear boundaries, positive relationships, family stability, support, and caring. Others concerned schools themselves, as well as the families' relationships with schools and their views of academic pursuits. He found that high achievers' families frequently initiated contact with the school and expected to play

major roles in schooling. They established achievement-related norms, deferred to children's knowledge in intellectual matters, and expected their children to be accountable for their achievement. They expected their children to continue their educations after high school graduation. In addition, successful students had *"some stimulating, supportive school teachers* [emphasis added]" (p. 200). Clark asserts that schools have misunderstood how home and community settings work together, and have had a general lack of knowledge about their own clients, the students, which has allowed stereotypes to shape their beliefs about poor and minority children and their families (pp. 211-213).

Benefit to Schools of School-Community Collaborations

Not only are family and community strongly influential in shaping students' sense of self-efficacy and future expectations, they can directly affect the quality of schooling. Thomas Hatch (1998) describes ways in which the communities of Alliance schools (a network of more than 100 schools dedicated to developing a constituency of parents, community leaders, and educators) have contributed to students' academic achievement by improving both conditions and opportunities for learning. Hatch says common patterns among the schools suggest that community involvement contributes to improvement in

- the physical conditions, resources, and constituencies that support learning;
- the attitudes and expectations of parents, teachers, and students; and
- the depth and quality of the learning experiences in which parents, teachers and students participate. (1998, p. 16).

He observed that community action to improve the physical conditions for learning in Alliance schools had a synergistic effect, in that people in poor communities who discovered they could make a difference were empowered to press for more substantive improvements. Educators who witnessed parents and community members

working on behalf of students and schools were heartened and felt more accountable for the quality of their instruction. The result was improved student achievement (p. 18).

Benefits to Communities of School-Community Collaborations

Although the ultimate goal of collaboration among family, community, and school is to ensure the well-being and success of the next generation of community members, the literature on collaboration and partnership speaks as much of the value of the process as of the ultimate goal or product. In fact, the process itself may be an important product as the relationships and actions necessary to develop programs and conditions that benefit young people have the effect of expanding the fund of human and social capital necessary for productive living and healthy communities. As Bruner observed, "collaborations occur among people, not institutions" (Linquanti,1992, p. 2). Accordingly, much of the literature on collaboration is more focused on forming relationships among people than on creating formal, institutional agreements (McDevitt, 1996; Lane & Dorfman, 1997; Parson, 1999).

Building Relationships Between Home and School

Much has been written about actions school personnel need to take to build connections with families and tap their power to encourage students' academic success (Davis, 2000; Decker & Decker, 2000; National Association for Family Based Services, 1996; Rioux & Berla, 1993; White-Clark & Decker, 1996; St. John, Griffith, & Allen-Heynes 1997). Yet, actions absent the genuine belief that all parents have intrinsic value and are worth the effort to cultivate as partners are unlikely to be successful. Such actions have their source in instrumental rather than substantive motivations. In his study of restructuring in four accelerated schools, Edward St. John and colleagues (1997) observe that "schools have an amazing capacity to comply with mandates" (such as mandates to involve parents) "but to avoid wrestling with the deeper reasons why new behaviors have been mandated in the first place" (p. 5). They call for restructuring relationships in schools so as to empower both parents and teachers to

consider together their concept of what a school should be. They believe that teachers who feel powerless are unlikely to be motivated to share their (non-existent) power with families. They comment that "when educators in schools collaborate with parents to bring their sense of love and care into schools, empowering relationships emerge that promote child learning, adult development, self-realization, and community development" (p. 94). They call for occasions to be provided over time for teachers, parents, and administrators to consider together changes needed to promote the well-being of children in school.

Renee White-Clark and Larry Decker (1996) concur with St. John et al. that family involvement in schools is a process, not a program. They have found in their experience with community that most barriers to involvement lie with school attitudes rather than with parents. They recommend that parents be regarded as individuals rather than as representatives of groups, whether of race, culture, or income. Successful parent involvement, they say, forms and nurtures relationships (p. 47). Nevertheless, the call for attitude changes invites consideration of the quandary of which comes first. Does changed behavior produce changed attitudes? If not, how does one change school attitudes so that parents become welcomed and valued partners?

Larry Decker and Virginia Decker suggest that teacher training might change behavior, which might, in turn, change attitudes. They recommend that educators (teachers and administrators) be trained to involve parents; that time be provided regularly for teachers to meet and talk with parents; that important information and notices of scheduled events be disseminated early, more than once, and through more than one channel; that, when possible, events be scheduled more than once to accommodate parents' different work schedules; and that the school establish a variety of communication methods. The most effective communication channels, they remind the reader, are oral and face-to-face (p. 72). Most important, communication must be honest. Information must not be hidden, even when it is not what one is pleased to share with families or community members.

Gail Connors, in *Good News! How to Get the Best Possible Media Coverage for Your School*, says that education officials must earn trust by communicating in ways they might consider "radical or even outrageous" (2000, p. 4). She recommends that, when problems surface, the most effective way to address them is to admit them openly, and to act responsively and responsibly. Acting responsively means to be willing to truly listen to those negatively affected by problems or decisions, to explain their reasons and to acknowledge the pain they may cause to complainers. This plan of action does, of course, require that a problem has been responsibly dealt with and its solution has not been designed so as to favor some over others.

A difficulty in communicating with families and community lies in the fact that many administrators see their role as one of informing and soliciting support rather than one of listening and responding to community issues, according to research by Farkas, Foley, Duffett, Foleno, & Johnson (2001). Neither, they say, can district administrators rely on teachers, the most powerful potential connectors between schools and families, to offer information and respond to concerns, since teachers themselves rarely feel informed about problems or included in decisions. As a result, school board meetings become the vehicle for hearing family and community concerns, and this vehicle is most likely to be used by those with axes to grind or special interests. The researchers warn that when communication is not open or responsive, families compete with one another for attention. They tend to hoard information and advocate for their own children rather than for all children.

Along with empowerment of families and teachers, honesty, openness, attentiveness, and responsiveness to all families are themes in family involvement literature that also apply to literature about the importance of forming school-community collaborations.

Use of Technology in Building School-Community Relationships

Much, if not all, of the literature on partnership and collaboration stresses the importance of substantive relationships among people; that is, relationships that are

supportive, emotionally satisfying, and grounded in continuing contact and communication. Recently, the rapidity with which the Internet and e-mail have transformed many people's communication habits has prompted claims about the power of technology to create new, egalitarian communities, i.e., "the global village." Such claims have not yet been well supported by research, but early evidence, while mostly anecdotal, is promising. Barry Wellman and Milena Guilia (1996) review accounts of virtual communities in *Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities*. They remind readers that the vision of community as locally and deeply connected is "pastoralist myth" rather than reality. In fact, they point out, "community ties are already geographically dispersed, sparsely-knit, connected heavily by telecommunications (phone and fax), and specialized in content" (p. 16).

As Wellman (1999) says in *Networks in the Global Village*, "the principal criterion for community is what people do for each other, not where they live." Wellman and Guilia (1996) find evidence that online relationships are similar to in-person relationships in their ability to be supportive, informative, and, in some instances, intimate. Also, for many people, online communication is no different than telephone communication. It is another means of maintaining relationships that would exist without computers. They consider fears that electronic communication will diminish face-to-face contact to be similar to fears expressed about the telephone, when it was new (p. 12).

The literature about technology use in school-community partnerships is limited and focuses primarily on partnerships created to bring technology to schools, or to train students and community members in its use. At this point, it appears that most writings concerning the use of technology to create or strengthen school-community networks are at the level of higher education. At the K-12 level, discussions focus on connections among students and between students and mentors.

One reason for the lack of information about the use of technology to connect schools with communities is the lag in its use in education, compared with business. This lag is particularly great in schools serving low-income communities. Susan

Otterbourg reported in1998 that almost 60 percent of U.S. schools were low-tech, lacking adequate classroom technology and, at best, having only outdated and inadequate technology. Elementary and middle schools were not using technology to communicate with parents, since only 12 percent used World Wide Web sites and 11 percent used e-mail. Even if schools were better equipped, only 11 percent of families with an income of less than $20,000 owned a personal computer. (Otterbourg, 1998). For example, in 1994 the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund launched a $6.5 million, multiyear project in three cities to improve children's use of out-of-school time. A key program component was the use of computers for collaboration and for parents and children to access information. Program planners found it would first be necessary to enhance equipment and collaborators' computer skills (Coltin & McGuire, 1997, p. 36). By 2000, according to a report on educational software use in a four-state region, "students and educators had gained expertise in basic computer skills but had not integrated technology effectively to promote student learning" (McGraw, Ross, Blair, Hambrick & Bradley, 2000, p. 3).

More recent reports reflect the speed with which technology is infusing all aspects of life. A report by the CEO Forum on Education and Technology (2001) indicated that by 2000, 98 percent of all public schools and 77 percent of all classrooms had Internet access. Not only did access expand in schools, it increased in homes, along with enthusiasm for its use. According to a telephone poll conducted in November and December 1999, "virtually all Americans under age 60 say they have used a computer (92 percent) and most of them have used the Internet (75 percent) or sent an e-mail message (67 percent) at some point in their lives" (National Public Radio, p. 1). More than half of home computer owners purchased them within the past five years.

Nevertheless, the "digital divide" remains. The CEO study reported a 20 percent gap in school and classroom Internet access between schools with the highest and lowest proportions of minority students. The same gap pertained to schools with the highest proportion of low-income students and those with the lowest (p. 28). Home

access improved among minority and low-income groups. People who purchased their first computers within the past two years were more likely than longer-term owners to be low-income. Still, there remained a 19 percent gap between Blacks and Whites with home access to e-mail or the Internet (NPR survey report, p. 2).

Even when people have access to computers and the skill to use them, the opportunity to communicate does not necessarily generate the desire to do so. A survey of 600 teachers by NetDay found that although 87 percent of teachers reported competence and ease with Internet use, only 6 percent said they spent an hour or more on the Internet each day. Sixty percent said they spent half an hour or less online (USA Today001). Joyce Ley (1999), in a formative evaluation of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's School Community Renewal Project, found that a listserv established to allow school and community participants to communicate with one another was used primarily to communicate with Laboratory staff. Such cautions do not suggest that technology is likely to be useless in supporting community networks, but that its value as a community-building tool will depend on access, comfort with the medium, and adequate motivation to communicate.

An *Educational Leadership Tool Kit* developed by the National School Boards Foundation to address the transfer of technology to education identifies ways technology *may* build connections between home, school, and community. However, it speaks of possibilities, not realities.

Certainly, scholarly interest is high in the nature and power of computer-mediated communities, as evidenced by such publications as *Composing Cyberspace: Identity, Community and Knowledge in the Electronic Age* (Holeton,1998); *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-mediated Communications and Community* (Jones,1998); and *Communities in Cyberspace* (Smith & Kollock, 1999). However, as Steven Jones points out in "Information, Internet and Community" (*Cybersociety*), the nature and power of computer-mediated community are not created by the communication medium, they are attained through it. That is, human desire to communicate is the motivating force that determines both the degree and kind of community achieved. Amy Bruckman, in

Finding One's Own in Cyberspace," asks the question "How do you help a community to become what you hope for." She offers a partial answer in claiming that "the personality of the community's founder can have a great influence on what sort of place it becomes." (pp. 173-174). Here she speaks primarily about online communities of interest, but her words have broader implications in that people who join any community are likely to feel either welcomed or ill at ease, depending on the nature of established norms. Educators will need to be particularly careful in efforts to connect schools and community members to create comfortable places for people likely to be intimidated or alienated by educational jargon and norms.

Community technology centers, sometimes housed in schools but operating after school hours, appear currently to have the most experience in building connections with communities through technology. An examination of promising practices in six community technology centers in California found community connections were enhanced through using electronic media for communication, using community people as center volunteers and advisors, and asking participants to carry out projects to address real community problems. None of the centers, however, were closely tied to schools. The researchers undertook the study because, while there are innovative programs across the country, "there is no overriding conceptual framework that unites them and that can support the design of effective programs in the future." (Penuel & Kim, 2000, p. 4). Two education-related electronic communities may offer clues for successful efforts to connect schools and communities electronically. They are the Blacksburg Electronic Village (www.bev.org), established in 1994 and Tapped In (www.tappedin.org), founded in 1996. Although differing in membership and purpose, both have attained relative stability and growth.

The Blacksburg Electronic Village is a community and student network. Although managed by Virginia Tech, it is designed to be an information and communication resource for all city and county residents. It includes information about and connections to local government, entertainment, arts, education, and other topics of local interest. In a 1996 *USA Today* article about the network, a middle school

teacher said it had helped him reach students and parents. "I really like getting notes, comments and questions online. How many other teachers get homework via e-mail?" A school board member established a listserv on the network that in 1996 had 369 subscribers (Kavanaough, 1999, p. 9). In a user survey, respondents named e-mail the most popular service, with the World Wide Web a close second. The most frequently used links were to library and reference tools and regional information, health care, VT (Virginia Tech) Web and Virginia resources (p. 4). The popularity of most can be explained by the fact that 85 percent of users were affiliated with Virginia Tech (p. 4). This fact tempers enthusiasm for the Blacksburg Electronic Village as a means to connect diverse community members with K-12 educators.

TAPPEDIN, an international network of professionals involved with K-12 education, was designed as a vehicle for teachers to participate in professional communities of practice. In August, 1998, TAPPEDIN membership numbered 1700 individuals and 12 partner organizations, and had a growth rate of approximately 100 new members a month (Schlager, Fusco, & Schank, 1998, p. 3). The services offered by TAPPEDIN are based on the premise that "an on-line environment should support the same ebb and flow of communication and information sharing that face-to-face work teams engage in over time" (p. 4). In addition to e-mail and mailing lists, it includes Web-based bulletin boards and multi-user virtual environments. Members choose among its features depending on the task at hand. Founder Mark Schlager describes the site not as a community but as a place for communities to form and gather. Most members join to interact with people with whom they have pre-existing tasks in common. Schlager warns that organizations "should not expect that if they build it, teachers will come" (p. 7).

The rapidity with which Internet use has spread through both business and private life holds promise for its value in building and supporting connections between schools and communities. Because recent polls and surveys indicate growing access to and comfort with the medium, the time may be ripe to realize its potential. Care must be taken, however, to provide a variety of ways for people to connect with one another because inequities of access still exist.

Stages of the Collaborative Process

In *Investing in Partnerships for Student Success,* Susan Otterbourg (1998) provides a basic guide to assist schools and communities in collaboration. She divides the collaborative process into three stages: (1) planning and development, (2) implementation and management, and (3) monitoring and evaluation.

Stage 1: Planning and development. During the first stage of collaboration, interested parties form a steering committee, recruit and organize stakeholders, create a vision, establish baseline measures, and set both short- and long-term objectives. Various stimuli can trigger a collaborative planning process. Often it is a crisis, such as the threatened state takeover of a school district or a rise in drug-related crime. Or an individual may provide the spark that energizes people to address a problem to which they were previously resigned (Ringers & Decker, 1995, p. 35). However, if leadership rests in one charismatic person, the effort is vulnerable to that leader's burnout or departure. Building shared leadership among diverse stakeholders needs to be part of the planning process, for it immunizes partnerships against over-reliance on one person, and builds skills and relationships that will become part of the social capital of the community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Lane & Dorfman, 1997). The critical importance of local leadership to such efforts is a drumbeat in the literature.

Equally crucial to program success is the inclusion of all stakeholders in the process, both because people need to feel ownership in the result and because their substantive involvement improves the quality of plans. However, building the collaborative relationships may require creating opportunities for informal conversation among people who do not normally interact.

Peter Bensen describes a need for "third places" that provide neutral ground where people can gather informally to talk, where no one is host, and where there is no official agenda. Such a place may be the local grocery or hardware store (1997, p. 151). Bensen also recommends tailoring messages about the planning effort to fit the audience. For example, one would speak differently to a local business owner than to a

parent, and differently yet to a service provider. However, such sophistication in message delivery has its dangers. Messages should not be so tailored to different audiences that people construct conflicting images about the nature and purpose of the proposed effort. That could damage trust and set the stage for disagreement among stakeholders.

The authors of *Building Home School, Community Partnerships: The Planning Phase* suggest "handshake" meetings as part of the recruiting process—one-on-one or small-group meetings with key people to identify concerns, gauge interest, and build ownership (Molloy et al., 1995). J. Casey Hurley (1999) offers an example of an educator skilled in such meetings. As a new principal, he sought out a well-know veteran principal and accompanied him to local gathering places where they chatted with townspeople. Primarily, the new principal asked questions and listened. She also identifies existing community forums, such as civic clubs, churches, and the like as recruiting venues. Hurley describes the first few meetings of stakeholders as pre-planning, used to define collaboration, outline the planning phase, develop ground rules, build positive dynamics, share what was learned from the recruiting process, and celebrate linkages.

As Angela Smithmier (1995) documents, an integrative approach to collaboration may disrupt fundamental conventions, routines, and forms, such as those of roles, responsibilities, clients, and time. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) recommends assessing readiness before beginning a planning process that may challenge local norms. Such an assessment means "looking hard at local leadership and collaborative experience, the complexity and risks of the initiative, the maturity of the organization(s) expected to carry it out . . . and the availability of a sufficient resolve and patience to build effective . . . communication." (The Annie E. Casey Foundation quoted in *Benefits2,* Issue 6 (2000). SEDL has developed a questionnaire for use in assessing readiness. The question of readiness is not whether conditions are ideal for collaboration—if they were ideal, collaborative action would already be occurring—but whether collaboration is possible, or if its outcome is likely to

be sufficient for the human and financial resources it will require. Michael Briand (2001) poses seven questions that must be answered satisfactorily from the participant's viewpoint, to determine if he or she is willing to commit to a plan of action: (1) Is this something I care about? (2) Will I have any control? (3) Is the context abstract or does it apply to the real world? (4) Is the discussion window dressing for decisions made elsewhere? (5) Are the choices offered complete or pre-chosen options? (6) Will the outcome really make a difference? (7) Will enough people work to make a difference, or will a few kill themselves while everyone else sits back?

Whatever the initial motivator, the collaborative process is conditioned by a common vision of an outcome that is widely and passionately desired. Only such a vision will sustain the persistence that will be necessary to overcome the inevitable obstacles and delays between the commencement of planning and its fruition (Adger & Locke, 2000; Batista, et al., 1995; Bensen, 1997). For example, Bette McDevitt describes a successful school-community collaboration in a economically depressed Iowa community. It began as a small-group effort in the 1980s to turn the school into a center for community programs. The group now boasts a membership of more than 120 citizens, including public officials, teachers, parents, *and students*. Committee meetings are open to all who wish to attend. The principal says that, although the school stays open from 6:30 a.m. until late evening, school security is of no concern because community members consider themselves "guardians of the school" (McDevitt, 1997, p. 2). When planning began, 65 percent of residents were on public assistance due to the closing of steel mills, and the state was considering a takeover due to the poor student performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. By the time the article was written in the mid-nineties, students were performing at or above average on the test and 65 percent of graduates attended college (Linquanti, 1992, p. 3). The involvement of students illustrate Robert Linquanti's contention that young people should be included in the planning process as contributors and respected resources, especially because the point of many school-community collaborations is to help students build essential skills for living and learning.

According to Joseph Ringers and Decker, seeking consensus during the planning process does not require that everyone be completely satisfied, but it does require that none be directly opposed to decisions. No necessary member of the group can remain seriously dissatisfied. Ringers and Decker recommend that the greater the number of agencies involved in an effort, the narrower its scope should be, in order to reduce the potential for conflict and dissatisfaction (1995, p. 32). This concern may be of less importance in collaborations between grassroots organizations and families, as they are less likely to be constrained by regulations and controlled by funding streams—although turf issues might still be a concern.

Linquanti suggests beginning the planning process with asset mapping rather than needs assessment, because "assets are where the community finds the power to regenerate" (1992, p. 3). Several experts recommend starting small and evolving over time, responding to needs as they arise, and learning through trial and error (Adger & Locke, 2000; Batista et al., 1995; Bensen, 1997).

There is frequent mention in the literature of the usefulness of a neutral third party in the planning process. Ideally, such technical assistance should be unobtrusive. As Mary Emery, a community development and outreach specialist, says, "the best technical assistance provider is when no one notices its presence" (Flora, Gale, Schmidt, Green, & Flora, 1993, p. 20). However, when circumstances prevent a local leader from initiating action, an outside technical assistance provider may be needed to get efforts underway. For example, Lane and Dorfman (1997) propose enlisting an outside facilitator to lead dialogue sessions among diverse constituencies in cases where a community lacks the connections across stakeholder groups to sustain collaboration. Such sessions can promote deliberative democracy, deepen understanding of issues by focusing on values that underlie opinions, establish common ground, and build trust. Molloy and colleagues (1995) say that neutral third parties can contribute to a positive environment by assisting groups to stretch beyond limits of traditional roles and influences and deal with conflict without losing focus on common goals.

Stage 2: Implementation and management. At this stage of school-community collaboration, participants create an action plan that includes professional development, marketing, measurement, reporting, and service delivery; identify activities; establish action teams; and implement action plans.

Lisbeth Schorr (1977) warns against looking to collaboration and integration of services as ends in themselves, claiming they have become popular over the past 20 years as a means to deal with shrinking resources. Programs that are resource-poor and ineffective will not be improved by collaboration, nor will people competing for shrinking resources likely be motivated to collaborate. Rather the reverse, according to Kathleen Cotton, who observes that "staff members and agencies are rewarded when they win more funds . . . for their departments, not for identifying needed services in another department or organization, even when those other services are exactly what should help a . . . young person succeed."

Schorr (1997) points to Missouri's Walbridge Caring Communities as an example of a collaborative effort that has flourished and scaled up because visionary state officials have been willing to modify financial and procedural regulations to support effective local problem solving (pp. 96-103). Don Davies (1996) concurs that to assist program planning and implementation, those with fiscal and policy authority must be willing to adopt clear written policies that promote collaboration and dedicate resources to support it. Likewise, Bensen (1997) reminds that local efforts must not be constrained by dictates designed to satisfy bureaucratic regulations that are inappropriate for the circumstance. He points out that each community effort is rooted in local conditions, whether or not it begins as part of a larger—regional, state, or even national—program (pp.124-25). According to Schorr, "Standardized solutions, develcped far away, have turned out to be notoriously unreliable because they reduce reliance on local knowledge and skill and limit the flexibility of people at the front lines to solve the problems they encounter" (p. 79).

Conversely, multiple benefits can arise from participatory involvement in local efforts. Ringers and Decker maintain that participation helps to build ownership,

empower those involved, create a pool of communicators and resources, identify and groom future leaders, and raise the public profile of the program (p. 29).

Stage 3: Monitoring and evaluation. The final stage in Otterbourg's model of collaboration includes measuring and reporting progress—both at the baseline and periodically throughout the process—then adjusting plans based on results. Annual results are then reviewed in order to plan for the future (Adger & Locke, 2000; Batista et al., 1995; Bensen, 1997). Charles Bruner (1998) warns that any accountability system should not discourage risk-taking and flexibility, since people may be trying to achieve results that have in the past proved elusive, and may need to chart new territory to do so (Bruner, 1998). Spears, Combs, and Bailey (1990) agree, saying that traditional measures, such as test scores, drop-out rates, and attendance, may be inadequate measures of impact. They point out that some goals, such as increasing understanding of local culture, may have no measurement instruments, and others, such as youths returning to the community after college, require time to assess. They feel that traditional measures—test scores, dropout rates, attendance, and the like—are rough but inadequate measures of impact.

Bruner recommends that the planning process be outcome driven, with outcome being a commonly understood condition of well-being for a child, family, or community. He says it is important to identify outcomes across physical, social, psychological, educational, and economic dimensions, so outcomes are stated as interrelated wholes. He proposes developing indicators for each outcome and setting corresponding benchmarks to monitor progress toward program goals. Bruner describes three levels of program evaluation. Level one refers to implementation accountability (i.e., Did the group follow the action plan?). The second level considers whether the strategy produced the intended impact. The third level assesses whether a combination of strategies has resulted in movement on one or more of the indicators (p. 33).

Characteristics of Effective Programs

In *Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America*, Schorr (1997) examines programs that have been highly effective in improving lives of children and their families. She identifies characteristics common to such programs:

- programs are comprehensive, flexible, responsive, and persevering
- they see children in the context of their families
- they deal with families as parts of neighborhoods and communities
- they have a long-term, preventative orientation; a clear mission; and evolve over time
- they are well managed by committed, competent people with identifiable skills
- their staffs are trained and supported to provide high-quality, responsive services
- they encourage practitioners to build strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect (p. 11)

Bruce Miller (1995) mentions similar attributes when referring to rural schools' role in community development:

- students are involved in all aspects of the program
- activities have broad-based support from local residents
- activities tap community strengths
- there is a widely shared common vision
- planning and governance are carried out by group processes rather than through top-down decision making
- local leadership is developed across stakeholders
- communication among planners and community is ongoing and informal

- there is trust among planners and participants, so that risk -taking is permissible
- even small accomplishments are celebrated

Schorr (1997) concludes that "caring and relationship seem to be the most important aspects of effective collaborative programs, although [that is] rarely explicitly stated" (p. 11). Meaningful relationships between schools and communities may therefore be necessary, perhaps ignored, components of successful collaborative ventures.

Obstacles to Forming Collaborations

Even when school-community collaboration appear promising, they may meet with obstacles. As former Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders remarked "We all say we want to collaborate, but what we really mean is that we want to continue doing things as we have always done them while others change to fit what we're doing" (School Mental Health Project, 2001, p. 1). bstacles to successful collaboration can be numerous and may sometimes seem impenetrable. As Dr. Elders and others acknowledge, the most common obstacles mentioned in the literature are those of turf and culture— "the way we do things here." (Batista et al., 1995; Sanders, 1999; Smithmier, 1995).

Institutional culture. The more organizations there are involved in a collaboration, the more difficult it can be to reconcile turf issues. In recognition of this difficulty, Steve Parson describes collaboration as "like dancing with an octopus" (1999, p. 101). However, such obstacles can be surmounted. If teachers (and members of other organizations) are instrumental in planning and informed about and connected with activities, cultures can shift to accommodate newcomers, provided their activities are regarded as beneficial (Briand, 2001).

The Institute for Educational Leadership calls for partnerships between communities and their schools that support both student learning and stronger communities (Jehl, Blank, & McCloud, 2001, p. 4). It cautions, however, that

collaboration between those whose attention is on community development and those who are concerned with educational improvement can be problematic. In *Education and Community Building: Connecting Two Worlds*, the Institute describes the different operating methods of the two groups. Historically, community development and well-being have been the purview of organizations that are small, whose operational structures are horizontal, and whose staff may hold a variety of roles over a comparatively short period of time and may operate with considerable autonomy. In schools, leadership is hierarchic, resting in official, credentialed positions. Such structure discourages boundary-crossing and flexibility, and typically resists bringing new people to the table (pp. 5-6). Therefore, part of the work of developing partnerships between schools and communities must be to develop mutual understanding, and possibly to help the school redefine itself as a community member, rather than an institution apart.

Political and economic conditions. Local collaborations cannot be expected to remedy conditions caused by global forces or a lack of national will. Like Schorr, Michael Apple points out that local efforts must occur in conscious awareness of larger social issues and larger contexts. He claims that "over the past decade federal and state governments have tried to shift the responsibility and blame for educational problems onto the backs of low-income parents" (Apple, 1996, p. 106). He quotes Michelle Fine who says, "Parental involvement is necessary but not sufficient to produce improved student outcomes. It takes the commitment of the community, state, and nation to serve children broadly" (p. 105).

Given that the problems a local collaboration attempts to address must be within its power to adequately affect, local conditions may impede or prevent collaborations from forming. Hierarchical power structures in school or community will resist the inclusive planning that the literature is unanimous in recommending (Kushman, 1999). Steve Farkas says too often schools treat inclusion of diverse voices as a public relations ploy, an effort to make people feel included without intending to be guided by their views. In such instances, the public is invited to participate in order to obtain their

approval for decisions already made (Farkas & Johnson, 1993). As Theodore Kowalski (1997) points out, decisions about whether and how to change can't be predetermined. They must emerge in the process of dialogue and reflection.

Rural residents are likely to have a variety of interconnections, the absence of which is often mourned in urban neighborhoods. These interconnections can nevertheless mitigate against change. People have tacit understandings about the way things work, who counts, and who doesn't. If challenged, these can impair friendships or even cost jobs. Maureen Porter (1996), in her account of school reform in an Appalachian community, details the slow progress of citizen involvement in the face of entrenched power. In such closed communities, the information needed to take action is withheld by those in power, who are not necessarily those in positions of official power. *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change* offers two possible configurations to describe a community's power structure:

(1) Pluralism, in which power is dispersed, overt, and rests with official position. Whoever has power in any given moment will depend on the issue at hand. The pluralistic power structure accommodates debate and is able to deal with conflict.

(2) Elitism, in which power is distributed hierarchically and informally. For example, in some rural communities certain landowners may hold no official positions, yet no official action is likely to occur that will displease them.

Such power can be discovered by noting the issues that are never publicly debated. (Flora, Flora, Spears, & Swanson,1992, pp. 251-269).

Where open debate is discouraged and information withheld, it takes a significant outside intervention to provide the fulcrum that can unsettle the norms and relationships that resist change (Duncan, 1999, p. 200). In such communities, those whose voices need to be heard may have lacked the opportunity to develop the social capital to be proactive. Attempts to change the status quo can leave people vulnerable to retaliation, or change can be easily resisted by the powerful. An indication of the social capacity of a community is the breadth of inclusiveness in the term "us" when it is used to distinguish "us" from "them" (Lane & Dorfman, 1997).

Rural and Urban Contexts

It is noteworthy that the body of literature on school-community connections is sharply divided into two areas: writing concerned with urban, inner-city schools and communities and writing concerned with rural schools and communities. Only indirectly, in examples offered, do writers refer to small city or other community configurations. In both urban and rural literature, writers point out the unique features of the community type they are addressing. Yet the most frequently mentioned problems of each are remarkably similar to those of the other.

The literature on rural school-community connections explains that rural communities are unique in their isolation and dependence on limited economic bases; it describes shrinking markets for rural (extraction) products due to shifts in national and global economies; it speaks of a loss of community vitality and declining tax base as people leave to seek jobs elsewhere.

The literature on urban school-community connections explains that inner-city communities are unique in their isolation from mainstream society, lack of access to metropolitan jobs, and shrinking tax base; it describes neighborhoods whose residents were drawn to the city by manufacturing jobs that no longer exist due to shifts in national and global economies; it speaks of an absence of community vitality, since those who could leave have escaped to the suburbs.

An explanation for this division in the literature may lie in the fact that the various funding streams for research and technical assistance are divided into those supporting distressed rural communities and those serving distressed urban communities.

The types of school-community collaborations discussed in the literature also differ according to urban or rural contexts. These types may originate in more essential differences between urban and rural environments. Scholars generally divide collaborations into three categories: community as curriculum, school-based enterprise, and school as community center. The rural literature offers numerous examples of all three (Colorado State Department of Education, 1999). Descriptions of urban collaborations address almost exclusively the third category: school as community

center (MacKenzie & Rogers,1997; McDevitt, 1997; Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Scholars emphasize the importance of *place* in the beliefs and values of rural people (Howley & Harmon, 2000; Miller, 1995; Nachtigal, 1982; Theobald & Curtiss, 2000; Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). They offer this importance as a rationale for developing place-based curriculum. Discussions of urban communities deal with their deficits. Although there are examples of urban students working to improve their communities, there is little mention of them investigating the features of place. One assumes that inner-city residents value their neighborhoods less, and are less likely to consider them suitable for student investigation. However, given that inner-city neighborhoods typically lack a sufficiency of local businesses, and given that the concept of school-based enterprise began as a response to urban joblessness, it is less clear why suggestions for school-based enterprise appear to be absent from urban school-community literature.

Harry Boyte, Co-Director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, and Nan Skelton address the dearth of opportunities for urban youth to contribute to their communities in calling for a "broad movement for civic education that includes a return to the commonwealth view of democracy" (Boyte & Skelton, 1997, p. 14). They quote Jane Addams, founder of Hull House in Chicago:

> There is a pitiful failure to recognize the situation in which the majority of working people are placed . . . a tendency to ignore their real experiences and needs and, most stupid of all, we leave quite untouched affections and memories which would afford a tremendous dynamic if they were utilized."

She felt "the sense of uselessness is the severest shock which the human system can sustain. If persistently sustained, it results in atrophy of function" (p. 15). Boyte and Shelton look back to the public works programs of the Depression years as a model for "a public work approach to education for democracy" (p. 16).

SEDL (1999a), which has worked extensively to develop school-community collaborations in rural settings, describes interconnections between schools and

communities that are more typical of rural than other contexts. The school is often the center of the community, its principal employer, and provider of "human capital."

While an urban school is located *in* a community, it is not often *of the community*. Employees are rarely neighborhood residents. Many do not share the culture or race of their students. Graduates seldom hold expectations of returning to productive neighborhood citizenship. This may explain why the literature on urban school-community connections so often describes community centers as interagency collaborations and refers to the families of students as "clients." Nevertheless, extending the rural strategies of considering community as curriculum and creating school-based enterprise to urban school-community relationships might be a productive effort. Not all urban communities are so blighted as to be beyond hope, and they may have more place value to their residents than has been recognized in the literature.

Noting that schools are often the only functioning community institutions in many urban neighborhoods, Rona Wilensky and D. M. Kline (1989) believe that

> ...because the political will doesn't exist to eradicate poverty through welfare state strategies, educators must develop schools which operate in the current environment. The future is stark; at the present rate, the nation is rapidly approaching the polarization envisioned by the Kerner Report of 1968—that of two unreconcilable societies—haves and have nots (p. 15).

Wilensky and Kline are among the few who propose making urban community problems the focus of study. They find that schools as service delivery centers are good, but not enough. Citing Coleman's discussion of social capital, they assert that children need to be educated as members of families and communities (p. 18) and need to become instrumental in their communities. Yet they describe urban neighborhoods primarily as sources of problems for students to address. Given that those who offer strategies for building school-community connections recommend identifying and building from strengths, one wonders how that is to be accomplished in locales where no strengths are assumed to exist.

Types of School-Community Collaborations

School as community center. The community schools movement originated in Flint, Michigan, in the 1930s, in response to a need for community revitalization. Recognizing the relationship between education and economic health, local school personnel, with support from Charles Stewart Mott and the Mott Foundation, developed the concept of opening school facilities to surrounding neighborhoods as year-round community centers, for the dual purposes of engaging community members in further educational opportunities and enlisting support for schools (Heimstra, 1997).

As currently conceptualized, community education embodies three main components: lifelong learning, community involvement, and efficient use of resources. (Community Education Home Page, 2001). Community schools are based on the idea that schools are not just places to teach children, but can be learning centers for the entire community.

Community schools often form partnerships within the greater community to draw on resources beyond the neighborhood boundaries to support children and families, and many now provide access to integrated family and social services as well as the more traditional child care and adult literacy instruction (Miller, 1995). Decker describes a community school as one that provides academic, extracurricular, recreational, health, social services, and workforce preparation for all ages and that involves community residents, organizations, and agencies in planning and delivery. Typically, each site has an advisory council that includes local residents, as well as representatives of participating organizations and agencies. Funding tends to come from a combination of school district and city budgets, grants, contributions, and entitlement funds (Decker & Boo, 1995). According to Ringers and Decker, most schools with facilities designed to be community centers have a health unit, recreation program for youth, a government satellite office, auditorium for events and performances, a patron service area (e.g. snack bar), nursery/day care, social service unit, and law enforcement unit (1995, p. 17). However, each school has a unique configuration of programs and services, determined by community needs,

preferences, and resources. Commonly, programs and services outside traditional school boundaries are overseen by a coordinator other than a school official.

Ringers and Decker (1995) recommend that school and community program staff share space whenever possible to promote conversation and cross-fertilization, as well as to reduce turf issues. For example, when a social service agency staff in one school used the teachers' lounge for breaks, discussion led to ideas for expanded programs for students. Senior citizens who used a school's fitness center during school hours began volunteering in classrooms. The recreation program director chatted during the day with teachers, who began to recruit children for the program (p. 13).

The agency-school collaboration model is described in a policy document from the Council of Chief State School Officers (1995). It calls for a school-based service delivery system that provides a continuum of seamless educational experience, supported by health, social, and family services. While a citizen advisory council is recommended, the model treats students and families essentially as clients—them, not us. The Learning Community, a system of community schools in Michigan, is an example of this approach. When a child enters the school, an in-take form that includes 28 risk factors is completed (Michigan Board of Education,1996, p. 25). Staff use this chart to identify and supply needed family support services.

Margaret Wang and colleagues describe the impact on students of a similar model, the Learning Center Program, based on their research at the National Center of Education in the Inner Cities. This model includes family and community in planning, and is linked with an instructional improvement process. In the three schools in which she conducted evaluations, she found students' academic achievement and attitudes toward learning improved significantly (Wang, Oates, & Weishew, 2001).

George Jeffers and Margaret Olebe (1994) discuss Howe Elementary School in Sacramento as another model that began as a school reform effort. A partnership with the California State University placed administrative, instructional, social work, and counseling interns in an ethnically diverse urban elementary school. Additional alliances formed with health and social service agencies. The staff and partners have

taken creative approaches to sharing funds to get around funding restrictions. Partners have achieved a high level of trust, as evidenced by the fact that role sharing is common. Whomever is informed and available represents the program in meetings, not the person who has the appropriate title.

One of the full service schools instituted by Florida in 1990, the Walter C. Young Human Resource Center lies in a small city. The building was designed to be a community school and has more of the flavor of community than a service delivery system in that it includes a dinner theater, community library, meeting rooms, and a fitness center. It is used so extensively that it is filled almost to capacity evenings and weekends. As might be expected from the greater focus on leisure activities, this center serves a middle and upper socioeconomic population (MacKenzie & Rogers, 1997).

The Maryetta School in Oklahoma is an example of a community school rooted in its rural community. A Blue Ribbon school in 1998, it serves K-8 students, a majority of whom are Cherokee. Community members see it as "the most important thing in this community "(SEDL, 1995, p. 13). The school offers educational, social, and recreational activities for all ages, and community members help identify, plan, and carry them out. Some parents hold keys to the school, so they may open it for activities when no staff is present—proof of the closeness and trust between the school and community. Instruction is bilingual at times, and respects and reflects Cherokee culture. Inclusiveness is a hallmark of the school's instruction and services. Even when funding is targeted at specific groups, leaders find ways to offer the same opportunities to all students. A sense of community is maintained through monthly potluck suppers open to all; these social events also include informal discussion of programs.

Ann Brooks and Paul Kavanaugh (1999) studied school-community relationships in southern Texas where Hispanic immigrants are numerous. They identified three ways in which school staffs conceptualized their relationships with their communities:

1. **Community as resource model**. This was the most common model the researchers saw, and the one most evident in literature on school-community relationships. This model defines community as business and government

agencies, to which school personnel look for help in solving the school's problems.

2. **Traditional community model.** Researchers found this model where school and community were culturally homogeneous and stable. This model views the world as community-based. School personnel are closely tied to and integrated with their community and see the school as a participant in helping to build and strengthen the community.
3. **Learning community model.** Researchers saw this model where the community was highly transient and culturally fragmented. The staff sees itself as the source of solutions to school and community problems. School personnel consciously aspire to create a sense of community within the school, not just work with the community outside the school.

School-based enterprise. Although none of the current literature on urban school-community connections reviewed for this document discusses school-based enterprise, one account of rural student entrepreneurs says entrepreneurial education gained prominence among educators concerned about opportunities for inner-city youth and moved from there into rural education (SEDL, 2000). Junior Achievement is a widely available entrepreneurial program that may be an urban version of entrepreneurship. This program offers classes during which students design, create, and sell a product, thereby learning about marketing, accounting, and other business practices. While the main purpose of such programs is educational, enterprise programs as conceived in the rural literature are also intended to benefit the community (SEDL, 2000).

Lisa Hinz (1998) identifies three types of enterprise:

- **School-business partnership**. A school and a business agree to work together to improve educational opportunities, benefit business, and support broader community goals. Such an agreement may produce income for the school without necessarily involving students. Examples: An elementary school might lease unused space to local businesses. Businesses might donate materials and expertise to a school with the expectation that skills

learned will ultimately benefit the business. A technology firm might donate computers, televisions, and staff for a computer training program. A school might offer training to employees of local businesses.

- **School-based business**. The school controls and owns an enterprise in which students gain experience as workers and managers. Profits belong to the school. Examples: Students build and sell houses, with the profits buying materials to continue the program and to support other programs. Students organize, equip, and staff a day-care program, restaurant, or bakery.

- **School-incubated business**. Students research, plan, establish, operate, and own businesses. They form corporations, profit from success, and suffer losses. They may continue the business as a private concern after graduation. Local experts in the school and community assist with training and advice. Example: High school students in Minnesota formed a corporation to buy and run a town grocery store when it went out of business. They received school credit for the endeavor.

Hinz (1998) says that these programs give classroom credit and operate during the school day, although some continue after school hours and offer wages for after-school work. All reflect local contexts and options, but some reach beyond local markets through Web-based and mail-order services. SEDL lists four organizations that support entrepreneurial learning: The PACERS Small Schools Cooperative; the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota; Schools at the Center, based at the University of Nebraska; and REAL Enterprises, a national program originating in North Carolina (SEDL, 2000).

Community as curriculum. Service learning is one form of community as curriculum. Over the past 10 years it has become popular in all community configurations and at nearly all grade levels, including higher education. Typically, service learning engages youth with service organizations in the community. While the service may go beyond established volunteer programs, it is usually planned in collaboration with a community organization to meet needs defined by that organization. The National Service Learning Clearinghouse provides two documents that enumerate service-learning guidelines (see Honnet & Poulsen, 1989, and National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 1995). Both emphasize tying the service to learning

goals and providing opportunities for students to reflect on their service experiences. The Clearinghouse defines service learning as a way for young people to learn and develop through active participation in experiences that

- meet actual community needs
- involve collaboration between the school and community
- expand the student's learning environment to include the broader community
- provide the opportunity for students to use academic skills and knowledge in real life situations (p. 3)

Ellen Honnet and Susan Poulsen identify the purpose of service learning as strengthening participants' ethic of social and civic response, thus leading them to feel more committed to addressing the underlying problems behind social issues (p. 3). Martha Boethel (n.d.) categorizes service learning programs under either charity or change. Programs designed for charity do not address root causes of problems, but rather cultivate altruism, civic duty, and responsive citizenship. An example of such a program might be adopting a neighborhood park and keeping it clear of trash while studying its ecology. She says programs focused on change encourage critical reflection about social policies and develop skills of political participation. An example might be studying the water quality of a local river and tracing pollutants to their sources. She cautions that while both are legitimate purposes of service learning, it is important to be clear from the beginning about a program's intent.

While the opportunity for students to reflect on their experience is considered a basic principle of service learning, analyzing and addressing problems that create the need for service appear not to be common features of the method, judging from the examples offered by the National Service Learning Clearinghouse and other service learning literature. Yet, if students are expected to reflect on their service learning experience, it is hard to understand how linking charitable action to consideration of underlying social, environmental, or economic problems can be avoided without compromising academic integrity.

The Foxfire program offers a somewhat different approach to using community as curriculum. Originating in Georgia in the 1970's, the first Foxfire projects engaged students in the work of *cultural journalism*—documenting and publishing information about local culture and history (Gibbs & Howley, 2000). The program emphasizes the importance of student work reaching authentic audiences beyond the classroom. This approach invites students to define their topics of interest and design their investigations, identifying and connecting with community members who can inform and assist in their research (Starnes, 1999).

The form of a school's relationship to community—whether it is that of community center, school-based enterprise benefitting the community, or community as curriculum—must be determined locally and will depend on the motivating force. To be successful, all three require reconceptualizing traditional roles, protocols, and uses of school time. All three require school personnel to be flexible and to have a tolerance for risk, uncertainty, and a certain amount of messiness. Discussing types of community relationships as discrete categories is somewhat misleading, for putting students in the context of community means allowing people to create programs that fit their needs. The results may fall into none of the categories or may combine the three. However programs originate, if they are vital to community and students they will evolve as community-school relationships strengthen and deepen.

Impact and Evaluation

In the context of current concerns over the quality of public education and the emphasis on state-level assessments as the primary determinants of student achievement, defining the impact of efforts to build school-community connections can be problematic. If student performance on state-mandated tests is to be the sole criterion for success, then more immediate results may come from improving teacher preparation and professional development. Taking factors of family and community demographics into account, Linda Darling-Hammond's research persuasively documents the primary impact of teacher preparation on student learning, as assessed

by test performance (Darling-Hammond, 1997). In fact, the Education Trust contends that when low-performing schools focus on strengthening the attributes of community, it may have the effect of undermining "efforts to demonstrate that all children can learn, no matter what the disadvantages of their family or neighborhood" (Merseth, 2000, p. 45). Her comment speaks to the inclination of some educators to believe they are helpless to counter what they view as family deficits that produce unteachable children. Certainly, personnel in low-performing schools should not look to family involvement *instead of* instructional improvement as a means to improve student performance. Too often, educators' interest in involving the family in education has the instrumental motive of "fixing" the family so it sends the school children who are easier to teach. Their interest in community involvement may have the equally instrumental goal of garnering more resources for the school, rather than improving the community of which the school is a member. Nevertheless, research findings are unequivocal that "parent involvement . . . improves student achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994a).

It seems intuitively obvious that creating a context that interweaves home, school, and community and that makes students valued and contributing members should have a powerful effect on student learning. But attempts to connect community collaborations and student test scores have been few and contradictory. A quantitative study conducted in Missouri compared community schools with others serving demographically similar students and found no significant differences in student SAT or MAP (Missouri State Assessment) scores (Nance, Moore, & Lewis, 1999). The authors conclude that school districts should be cautious about proclaiming that community schools will improve student achievement. Likewise, a rigorous examination of long-term outcomes for students who attended a Philadelphia middle school participating in the Community for Learning (CFL) program showed that when students reached high school they retained positive effects from their middle school involvement. In addition to differences in drop-out rates (19 percent for CFL participants vs. 60 percent for others), by the eleventh grade 48 percent of CFL students were performing at grade level, while only 26 percent of other eleventh graders in the same high school were working at grade level (Manning & Rodreguez, 2000).

Shelley Billig (2000) notes that research in the field of service learning "has not caught up with the passion that educators feel for it" (p. 660). She says, however, that available research is beginning to identify impacts. She summarizes a decade's worth of research, but points out that most of it comes from program evaluations that do not allow comparisons across programs. She reports positive effects of service learning on students' personal development, engagement in risk behaviors, interpersonal skills, and sense of civic responsibility. Among the reports summarized were those indicating that

- students in more than half of high-quality service learning schools studied showed moderate to strong gains on achievement tests in language arts or reading
- students who participated in service learning earned higher standardized test scores on Indiana's state assessment in third- and eighth-grade math and English than non-participants
- eighty-three percent of schools with service-learning programs reported that the grade point averages of participating students improved 76 percent of the time

In addition, research studies found positive effects on learning-related behaviors such as attendance and assignment completion.

The literature reviewed for this report was silent on the impact of student entrepreneurship on student test scores or other indicators of academic achievement. Possibly, the field is not organized enough to regard entrepreneurship as a program requiring evaluation, although the School-to-Work program may have identified outcomes that apply.

Several factors might explain the paucity of research on school-community collaborations. One is that full-scale evaluations are beyond the means of most programs. Even when they might be feasible, program leaders are reluctant to implement rigorous evaluations, if doing so diverts resources from program delivery (Clark, 1991; Dolan, 1995). Another is that school-community collaborations are diverse in design, management, and funding arrangements. According to Atelia Melaville and Martin Blank (1998), the number of school-community initiatives is

expanding rapidly, and initiatives are moving toward blended and integrated purposes and activities with a trend toward greater community involvement in all aspects of such initiatives. Blended and integrated purposes, and responsiveness to local conditions are identified in the literature as evidence of healthy collaborations, but they make systematic evaluation challenging, especially if the outcomes by which they are measured are limited and narrowly defined. An added difficulty is that there is little research on which elements of such blended and integrated programs are critical to success. A third difficulty is that people involved in school-community partnerships are often moving targets, particularly in low-income areas. Tracking highly transient families can be prohibitively expensive (Dryfoos, 1994, p. 124).

In addition to impact on test scores of students, self-reported outcomes of collaborations include

- increased community support for schools (Porter, 1999)
- improved graduation rates, greater student participation in school governance, reduced family mobility, fewer teen pregnancies (Melaville, 2000)
- less vandalism, increased parent participation, improved public relations, better parenting practices, decline in instances of child abuse, raised scores in a national assessment of positive youth development assets (Coalition for Community Schools, 2001)
- more trust and ownership in schools, increased community unity, improved family relations, reduced out-migration (Stoops, 1994).

As this list reflects, collaborations are tremendously varied and their potential outcomes numerous and difficult to assess. In *Accommodating Change and Diversity: Linking Rural Schools to Communities*, Peggy Spears concludes that

> Efforts to link rural schools to their communities require measures that capture adult as well as student outcomes. Indicators must be developed which are sensitive to the capacity of an innovation to impact the community as well as the quality of education offered to young people. Current indicators are fundamentally tied to industrial models of schooling and cannot guide

> restructuring efforts, especially those that may be most meaningful to rural schools (Spears et al.,1990, p. 27).

These conclusions have application beyond rural school-community collaborations.

An interdisciplinary group of researchers, policymakers, and experts in education and community engagement gathered in October 1999 to develop research agendas for revitalizing rural, persistent poverty communities. Some of their research topics might apply to building school-community connections in all environments. They came together at the invitation of AEL, Inc. in an effort to cross disciplinary boundaries. They recognized that past research had been specialized, with economic researchers examining community markets while education researchers studied public schools. Rarely was research designed to consider the dynamics of interplay within communities and between communities and schools. The group recommended interdisciplinary research about methods to empower local schools and communities so both can create and benefit from an enhanced quality of life. They described this research as participatory, and guided by community priorities. (Carter, 1999).

Insights and Implications for AEL's Work

AEL intends to work with and examine the interactions between schools and their communities, taking communities to mean both geographic locales and communities of interest. It seeks to understand how high-performing schools engage their communities and what effect such engagement has on their students and on other community members. It asks what conditions will stimulate low-performing schools to reach out to their communities, and whether their efforts will produce similar results.

Paul Berman and David Chambliss, among others, have conducted research in schools they describe as high-performing; that is, schools whose low-income students have had exceptional success. People in these schools have a vision of teaching and learning that fires their passion and they hold that vision in common with their communities. School and community members plan and work together. Plans are based on data, are flexible, and take into account particular school and community

contexts. Structures and resources are aligned to support their efforts, and leadership is distributed rather than hierarchical. As yet, these researchers have not provided details about the methods high-performing schools have used to engage their communities. However, this literature review offers some insights about the nature of relationships between schools and communities.

It appears that the conditions that exist in high-performing schools are similar to those in viable communities—both have high levels of social capital. People hold a common vision and care enough about their vision to be willing to share information and power to achieve it. The quality of relationships among people seems to be the critical element within schools, within communities, and between schools and communities. Such relationships must be substantive rather than instrumental, since manipulation is not relationship. Knowledge and skill, while necessary, will not be enough to bring improvement if people do not care enough to act, are unwilling to work together, or if they work only with some, while excluding others in the school or community. AEL will need to be alert to issues and concerns that hold widespread and strong interest across diverse constituencies, using them as motivators for engagement.

In addition to relationships, flexibility is a theme in the literature. No model for community development or school improvement can be adopted in toto. Each locale, whether urban or rural, has unique features that must be taken into account in shaping plans. At the same time, it may be a mistake to assume that strategies appropriate in poor rural communities will be different from those appropriate in poor urban communities. Both are disenfranchised; strategies to address that reality may not differ substantively. Nor is any locale static. Plans must change as circumstances change. Therefore, nurturing people's skills in planning and implementation may be as critical as the plans themselves.

If building connections between schools and communities is intended to benefit students, then students should be part of school-community interactions, however possible. They will benefit from the experience of being part of a community concerned

with their well-being, and the community will benefit from their idealism, insights, and energy.

Berman and Chambliss (2000) have identified school levels of readiness for reform. Accordingly, AEL will need to determine both communities' and schools' levels of readiness to engage with one another for the benefit of both, and craft or adapt strategies appropriate to their readiness levels. At this point readiness measures have been designed for community development and for school improvement, but none appear to exist for the intersection of the two.

Because, as was pointed out by Wellman and Guilia (2000), the term community is not synonymous with locale, and because all locales exist in and are influenced by larger contexts, AEL will need to identify and work with those economic, governmental, and educational entities that, while beyond the boundaries of particular locales, shape opportunities in those locales. It will also be critical to seek out and connect to diverse communities of interests, such as civic and religious groups that are working to improve individual and community well-being.

Interactive technologies can have the power to connect people within and among communities. As technology's potential to support connections between schools and communities is only beginning to be developed, AEL will need to document carefully issues that emerge, as well as obstacles and successes in building and using electronic networks.

Finally, there must be two types of evaluation. One will assess the progress toward goals identified by school and community members. This type of evaluation should be implemented in concert with community members, so they understand the evaluation process and own its result. The second level is external evaluation of the process of developing school-community connections in low-performing schools, using methods that have been successful in high-performing schools. This evaluation might follow Bruner's recommendation to identify outcomes at the macro level, indicators that contribute to the outcome, and benchmarks to capture movement within the indicators.

In this work AEL follows others, since much work has been done in urban and in rural communities to build school-community connections, whether through making schools community centers, using the community as curriculum, or encouraging student entrepreneurship. AEL's work will therefore benefit from the experience of others. It will extend others' work by incorporating technology and examining its effectiveness in building connections. And it breaks new ground in expanding its attention to broader communities and in developing measures of readiness for community-school collaboration.

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